

*You Can't
Clap With One Hand*



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VANTAGE PRESS

NEW YORK

WASHINGTON

HOLLYWOOD

**YOU CAN'T
CLAP WITH ONE HAND**

FIRST EDITION

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Published by Vantage Press, Inc.
120 West 31st Street, New York 1, N. Y.

Manufactured in the United States of America

To My Wife

CHAPTER ONE

"Graduated!" Tiger shouted. He sprinted after his classmate Ming to the dormitory of a high school in Peking, China. Pushing him roughly aside, he leaped ahead through the door.

There was about the young man of eighteen the vital quality of savage energy. His eyes glared like those of a cornered fox. Sardonic shrewdness glinted in their pupils. Tiger could dominate his classmates with the flick of his lashes. Though both young men were Chinese, their eyes were different. Ming's were clear and straight and good. At that moment, though, they were far from sparkling with kindness.

"That Tiger!" he fumed inwardly. He is like the roaring waves of our China Sea—always bursting out, swallowing up something, pushing himself forward.

"Graduated!" Tiger shouted once more. Then added with sober sarcasm, "In a patched cotton suit, with hands roughened by hard work, my young body tired like that of an old man from working night after night in a printing shop to earn my living."

Waves of resentment tightened his lips as he looked at Ming's neat suit.

"Going home, aren't you? Home to eat sesame cakes. For me there won't be any. But then, I have learned to eat bean-drag flour, ground peanut shells, and peelings."

"Don't be so grim. I don't despise you for having on a patched suit at our graduation."

"You might not; but your father will. He sees me as a mere brat from the street, an undernourished boy of eighteen.

That is why I am so glad to have a surprise for him—a special one.”

Tiger threw himself onto the brick bed which lined an entire wall of the dormitory. His eyes bored deep for some sign of apprehension on his classmate’s face.

“It was a good commencement talk,” Ming said to hide his feelings, “even if it was Party propaganda pure and simple.”

Tiger sat up with a start. His shoulders twisted as he searched his brain for words with which to hurt Ming.

“Party propaganda! Of course it was! It had to be. Ours is a one-party Communist regime.”

“You can’t clap with one hand,” Ming said. He stopped and gave his classmate a swift glance. Had he said too much? Did his disapproval sound sharp?

“Clap? Who is asking for applause? Our Party prefers to clench its hand into a fist. One doesn’t require two hands to seize control. The grasp, the clutch is needed. Our one-hand system has brought our country the most complete revolution in five thousand years of our history, the greatest leap forward.”

Tiger lit a cigarette. School rules forbade smoking, but now that he had been graduated, he felt above such laws.

Ming stared at the cigarette slanted across Tiger’s chin, thinking, “I never seem to be able to get away from that fellow. Forever we are thrown together, almost as if he had been assigned to spy on me. Has he? Or hasn’t he? It is as if we two were running a three-legged race—tied together, arms about each other for support. We have to stick to each other for our own protection, scared as both of us are of the all-knowing, all-seeing spy system of the Party.”

It was as if the hot scent of violence were circling about Tiger as he sat crouched on the *k’ang*—brick bed. In the turmoil of his rising hate, his teeth gleamed white between his snarling lips.

“Your father’s big business swallowed up our little one,” he continued. “Made us poor. It was he who pushed me

night after night into that printing shop. It was he who forced me to pick up my education the way a hen scratches for a worm."

A blind impulse to hit Ming welled up in Tiger—puffs of jealousy, squirts of hate. "Some day I'll get even with him," he thought. "College I can't manage; but I'll enter the Communist army, become a soldier, an officer, a leader, a dictator. Then I am going to drag every rich merchant down—way down into the mud."

Ming listened with a clearing perception to every word Tiger said. "Right now in his anger he is disclosing his real motives," he said to himself. "I must always remember him the way he is now, like the wild roughness of the tide sweeping on, swallowing up all that stands in its way. When the calm of the ebbing tide returns, behind which he hides his Party secrets, I must remember how dangerous he can be."

"I am an activist," Tiger said. "You know that much, don't you? I've been one for two years."

"I'll give you some other news. On this day of my graduation, the Party has promoted me to a Big Brother, an informant. That means that from now on I'll be the leader of all the people of our block, including you and your father and mother. Isn't it glorious to have a Big Brother to advise you in every detail of your life?"

The significance of this assignment overwhelmed Ming with the strength of a wild wave. He actually ducked his shoulders against it. Otherwise he made no move; neither did he raise a hand in defense. He remained silent, save for a suppressed groan in his throat.

But suddenly he straightened and threw off his alarm with all the effort he could muster. He decided, "I'll fight him and his Party with all my might! No bitterness will gnaw on my heart, tear at it, sap my strength; all my powers will be under my control so that I can refuse to become a member of the Communist Party."

Ming was fully aware that he stood in the midst of the chaotic turbulence of a fierce tide, in the thick of Tiger's

dark hate. The skin along his spine tingled with apprehension. From now on he would have to secure a written permit from Tiger if he needed to go farther than eight miles from his home, beg his consent to go to college, solicit approval of his friends, ask him what to read, what to wear, and which meetings to attend.

"Come with me," Tiger said. "I have to tell your father something you too might want to hear."

"I was not going home," Ming said.

"Then you'll have to change your mind. This is an order. It is your Big Brother speaking."

The two went, Tiger with his eyes dead-black with resentment, Ming watching the dust from the unpaved street that spurted out from the sides of his shoes. They did not speak until they had arrived at the shop, "The Dragon."

"Five generations," Tiger declaimed, filling the air with his blatant voice. "A good old shop. It has filled the rice bowls of five generations of your ancestors. The money that must have gone through the cotton padding of that door-flap! That gilded front and that old carved wood must have pleased them mightily. Once it was a dignified silk shop, a fascinating place for the rich to spend their money. Now, since our Party has forbidden the wearing of silk and satin, it has become a lowly cotton shop. Next month it will undergo a further change. Mark my words! Next month all private shops will be done away with."

"Done away with? Our ancient shop! By whom?"

"By our Bureau of Cooperatives. Private business will no longer be allowed."

Tiger let his glances rove up and down, up and down and back again. Suddenly his eyes caught the reflection in the window of Ming's father preening himself a bit in a large mirror. A flare of hate quickened his pulse. He noted every characteristic of the stately figure, the clear-cut features serene with easy living, and the smile-wrinkles about the corners of the eyes.

T'ien Ling turned and sauntered outside, unconscious of

Tiger's glare, and lighted his two-foot pipe with its tiny bowl. He felt good. He felt contented. His soul lived placidly behind a protective wall. One glimpse, though, at Tiger standing beside his son, made the wall of his immunity crumble.

"Father of Ming," Tiger said without any of the polite preliminaries of the young to the old, "on this day of my graduation, I have been promoted to become the Big Brother of this block on our street."

"You? A mere underdone little shrimp is going—" T'ien Ling checked his tongue and hastily added, "Another secret household policeman, eh? Are we then going to have them by the thousands?"

"No, by the millions—so our Party has decided. In fact, one-fourth of the total membership of our group will be so engaged."

"Will you, a mere boy of eighteen, be telling me, a man of fifty, what to do? May you die before marriage!"

T'ien Ling gazed at the lad hard and long. Ming winced. What would Tiger do at such an insult? Arrest his father for insubordination to a Party officer? Ming waited. Nothing happened. Tiger acted as if he had not heard.

"Our Party is of the young," he said finally. "Differences of ages we do not recognize. A young man may be ardent and wise, an old man indifferent and a fool. Well, my first duty consists of informing you, your wife, your children, and your personnel that one and all of you will have to attend indoctrination classes three evenings a week at the Chiao Tao K'ou hall. And that for three years in succession."

"For *hsi nao*?"

"Save your sarcasm. Call it 'brain-washing' if that amuses you. We call it 'correct thinking.'"

It was as if T'ien Ling heard his brain crackle with opposition. He could no longer hold himself in control. "You—!" he burst out. "You pauper—! You ought to be slaving in a factory like your father to pay back the money he still owes me."

More than the former insult, this one wounded Tiger's pride to the quick. His anger mounted to frenzy and a hazy cloud hovered before his eyes.

"Pauper!" he hissed. "Pauper!" As Tiger repeated the word, his whole body sprang into action and he made a sudden move to slap T'ien Ling's face.

Ming sprang forward and caught Tiger's hand in mid-air. Clearly his father's condemnation had whipped his classmate's fury to an epileptic pitch. He almost expected Tiger to fall any moment into a fit and foam at the mouth. Ming wanted with all his heart to rush to his father's aid, harangue Tiger, and fight a battering battle. But he realized in time that such a course might land his father in a concentration camp. Had not thousands upon thousands of reactionaries already disappeared and never been heard of again? So with his last drop of nervous energy he got hold of himself.

"Never again try to insult a Party member." Tiger's voice was very cold. "Not if you want to avoid being taken to a work-gang, digging sewers."

T'ien Ling said meekly, "Where would I find time for three evening classes a week?"

"Time? Thought-mobilization meetings take precedence over any other occupation! We consider correct thinking the path to our success."

"But—but—my wife can't read!"

"The Party will teach her. Mass illiteracy will be done away with within five years."

"Of five hundred million peasants?"

"Of all of them. One more thing: before attending classes, be sure to acquaint yourself with our methods."

"Methods?"

"The ones we adopted from Christian revival meetings. Start with confessing, publicly admitting your coldness of heart toward communism. Then speak of your change of heart, your *jo-hsin*—warmheartedness—in accepting our doctrines."

"And if my heart proves to be *shih hsin jih*—a dead heart?"

"Then you'll be taught by work. Paving of streets and building of steel mills have proved to be excellent teachers of the slow of heart."

"Manual labor! I, whose ancestors for generations have never soiled their hands, would I have to—?"

"A new age has come about. Physical labor is esteemed now. Our regime has done away with despising coolies."

T'ien Ling's eyes narrowed into the quick fire of contempt as he started, "But—"

"There are no buts. A new law, too, has come about. From now on there will be no masters and no servants. From now on professors, office workers, merchants, and housewives all will have to spend two hours a day at some physical task for the improvement of our country."

"Physical tasks?"

"Planting of millet and rice, sweeping of streets, trimming of our parks, and whatnot. Gone are the officials with long fingernails, gone the scholars with hands tucked into long sleeves. And now, comrades, I have other duties to attend to. Be sure to notify me when more than two friends call at your house; I'll have to sit in to direct your conversation. Be sure to remember that I am the Big Brother of this block on your street."

In puffy sullenness, T'ien Ling re-entered his shop, followed by Ming. He seated himself beneath the shrine that hung high on the wall. He detached himself, isolated himself from what had happened. "Isn't the idol of my shop living in his joss house right above my head? What could happen to me? He'll protect me and my business." T'ien Ling had never seen how hollow his placidity and beliefs in idols really were.

"I'll hold on to the heritage of the ages," he continued. "I'll be free from any of these newfangled Communist ideas. I'll never give in. I'll keep my head cool."

Ming gave his father a searching glance. His heart contracted with compassion. At the same time, though, he sensed

an opportunity to aid his own future. "I am young. My life is before me," he thought. "Would this be the time to tell him that I want to go to college, that I don't want to follow in the footsteps of my ancestors and become proprietor of the shop? Anyhow, private business may be done away with by the Communists."

Ming hesitated. He took a cigarette, lighted it, and handed it to his parent. T'ien Ling patted the slender fingers of his son.

Then his hand dropped in a gesture of finality. He had been in the grip of an unwonted spell of resentment. He was now free of it. He would turn his memory into a sieve. The unpleasant encounter had passed.

"My shop idol will protect me," he said again, more to himself than to his son.

Ming made the plunge and said, "Luck, the son of shop-owner Chang is going to college. Yet his father is not richer than you are. My teacher wants to call on—"

T'ien Ling did not listen. "Don't ever again speak to me about that upstart!"

"About Luck? Why, he is the cleverest—"

"I mean Tiger. Don't ever mention the name of that worm—not after all the trouble I have had with his father's debts!"

Anticipation had made Ming breathe heavily; but the fire of his expectation had died a sudden death.

"You'll have to face him," he said boldly.

"Have to?"

"He can't be avoided. He is a member of the Party, an activist."

The bones of T'ien Ling's jaw sharpened. His eye-sockets deepened. "Those Communists! With all the thousands of our gods, how ever did those unbelievers get into control?"

"We had gone through eight years of war with Japan, remember? Eight years of defeat, invasion, and occupation. Our people had become poor. Remember?"

T'ien Ling felt humiliated, stripped, exposed. Even his son was speaking to him in the bold way of the new time.

He ignored the affront and said with unwonted meekness, "I remember."

"Within six months, Japan had carried out the greatest conquest the world has ever seen," Ming said. Then he dropped the subject. Would he, could he, now mention wanting to go to college? The light of resolution started to flash into his eyes again.

But T'ien Ling said, "The Japanese were able to take our country because our gods were asleep."

"No, Father! No! Because our National Government was so corrupt."

"Corrupt?"

T'ien Ling remained speechless. Disapproval was written on his features. But slowly his face changed, and the scowl disappeared. He said, "I'll admit that much. There was a great deal of corruption by Chiang's officials. Not by him, though. The farmers around Peking had been forced to pay twenty-one years of taxes ahead of time. But it was the war lords who demanded that; there are always opportunists in a country at war."

"There was also enormous graft, Father."

"Oh, graft and corruption! We never have had absolute standards. Graft has been our problem for centuries; corruption has been practiced for thousands of years. None of that was created by Chiang."

"That is just why we needed a new broom, Father."

"We are an old and mellow people, son. We Chinese don't like new brooms that sweep clean. We don't care for extremes."

"Nevertheless, some group, some party had to abolish the bribe system which ruined our economy."

"Bribes! In all of our history, government salaries never have been adequate. Bribes! They have always been the expected way to supplement one's income. Don't blame the National Government. It was better, much better, than the Manchus whom they replaced."

"It was inefficient."

T'ien Ling wanted to rebuke Ming. Instead, he decided to ignore the modern impudence of the young and to treat it with lightness.

"And it was undemocratic, too," Ming added before he could conquer his desire to criticize the National Government further. His father arose from his wooden chair in annoyance and started to pace about the shop. Ming watched him, turning his eyes like a weather vane following the wind. "There now! I have spoiled the opportunity to talk about my education. I have provoked him," he thought.

"You talk like an American," T'ien Ling said. "By our standards, the National Government brought this country nearer to democracy than it has been in five thousand years. We have always had one captain on our junk. We don't want a group of them, as they have in America. Ours was a young government struggling against the absolute monarchy the people still clamored for. Besides, it had to set up dozens of provincial governments, then move them back hundreds of miles to get away from the Japanese. No wonder some of those provincial governments produced dictators!"

"Dictators!" a voice called out. "Who dares to call our Communist leaders dictators?"

It was Tiger's voice. T'ien Ling and Ming turned about as if they had heard a shot. Tiger stood in the entrance, holding the door-flap behind him. He had entered unseen, his eyes stark, black, and threatening. Some irresistible current seemed to pass from him and fill the shop until both father and son cringed with apprehension. All his life T'ien Ling had trained himself not to let his countenance betray emotion. Few could ever see the throb of vitality vibrating within him. But Tiger had seen. Clearly he sensed the aura of dread clinging like vapor about T'ien Ling. His eyes glinted with sardonic satisfaction.

"Yes, it is I, offering the solution to all of your problems. I have come back to bring you a membership card of our Party. Sign it, become one of us, and your junk will have smooth sailing."